“You Ain’t Seen Nothin’ Yet!”

In this column last week, I wrote about some of the changes I have seen in Waikiki over the past 55 years. This week, I want to point out that Travel & Tourism everywhere will continue to see dramatic changes in the years ahead, but the rate of change will be even greater than before. Like it or not, as the carnival Barker says, “You ain’t seen nothin’ yet!”

Take for example the impact of the Internet on Travel & Tourism. As pointed out by Philip C. Wolf, CEO of PhoCusWright, Inc., an independent travel, tourism, and hospitality research firm, we have been in the initial phases of the Internet for the past decade. Outrigger put forth its first website in November 1994. It was pretty simple, and the response times were terribly slow, as were most others in the area of hospitality – and most other industries, for that matter. Wolf calls that period “Travel 1.0.” (If it were a college course, it might have been called Internet Basics 101.)

Still, Travel 1.0 caused a significant change in the way we interacted with many of our customers, and the online travel company Expedia was suddenly our biggest single source of business.

In Travel 1.0, price was the dominant consideration. “Name your price, find the lowest price, price guarantees, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Price drove online adoption in historic proportions,” says Wolf.

In the past few years, technology has improved tremendously. Websites are becoming much more sophisticated and are now able to give potential customers far more information than ever before. While price is still important, several factors have come together; pushing us into a new era that Wolf calls “Travel 2.0.”

One of the exciting developments we are seeing is the ability to innovatively merge real-time information from several websites and databases into new, composite websites that provide far more detailed, graphic, up-to-date, and personalized information that people will find very useful. The resulting websites are called “mash-ups.” This term probably comes from pop music, where a DJ takes the vocal track from one song and combines it with the instrumental track of another song to produce an entirely different composition, according to Wikipedia, the web-based encyclopedia.

For an example of an Internet mash-up, go to www.hnlhousing.com, which combines information on available rental units in Honolulu from Craig’s List (www.craigslist.org – an online classified service) and Google maps (http://maps.google.com – a mapping service), to produce a display that shows both location and rental details. Videos can also be easily added to mash-up displays. (Note: Certain websites such as Craig’s List cannot be accessed from inside the Outrigger network firewall. If you cannot reach them at work, try from your home computer.)

Another new web technology is called “meta-search.” By grabbing information from multiple search engines such as Google, Yahoo, etc., meta-search programs are turning into cost-management tools for the travel consumer. They can graph out the highs and lows of airline fares and suggest the best time to buy airline seats to certain destinations. It is just a matter of time before they start doing that for specific destinations and resorts. See www.lib.berkeley.edu/TeachingLib/Guides/Internet/MetaSearch.html for a good overview of meta-search engines.

It is all cutting-edge stuff, but mash-ups and meta-search engines may soon be widely adopted by Travel & Tourism companies around the world if the many legal and licensing issues can be resolved.

Outrigger and OHANA have always been leaders in the use of technology in hospitality. We have seen the use of our website grow significantly, and web business is currently up 40 percent over last year—on top of the remarkable 90 percent gain achieved in 2005 over 2004.

We will continue to invest heavily in our online capabilities to make sure our company continues to be a great place to work and grow. You ain’t seen nothin’ yet!